

How can anyone believe in Jesus?

Answering 10 common arguments against Christianity

Compiled from the Bible and numerous histories, commentaries and other sources by Gary A. Williams, December 31, 2015

1.

Claim: There's little historical evidence to support what the Bible says about Jesus.

Response:

Jesus spent his entire life in an area that covers about 64 square miles. That's roughly one-third the size of San Jose, California. There are numerous sources that speak to his existence, and to what he said and did during his approximately 33 years on earth. That he lived, rose to fame for his teaching, and died on a Roman cross is beyond question. Sources that confirm the life of Jesus include:

Roman History

- The works of Flavius Josephus, a famous first-century historian who was born in Jerusalem. Josephus fought against the Romans during the First Jewish–Roman War as head of Jewish forces in Galilee. In A.D. 67, he surrendered to Roman forces led by Vespasian. Josephus became a slave and interpreter for Vespasian. After Vespasian became Emperor in 69, he gave Josephus his freedom, at which time Josephus became a Roman citizen and even claimed the emperor's family name of Flavius. Flavius Josephus then became an advisor and friend of Vespasian's son Titus, serving as his translator when Titus led the Siege of Jerusalem, which resulted in the city's destruction and the looting and destruction of Herod's Temple (Second Temple).
- The records of various Roman governors

Jewish History

- References about the life and death of Jesus in the Talmud (The Talmud is the record of centuries of discussion expounding the Oral Law of Judaism as it took place in the Torah academies of the Land of Israel and Babylonia long ago – www.torah.org).
- The accounts found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Between 1947 and 1956, nearly 1,000 ancient scrolls were found in caves along the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. These documents are made of animal skin, papyrus and forged copper, and have been important to those seeking to shed light on the histories of Judaism and Christianity. Among the texts are parts of every book of the Hebrew canon—what Christians call the Old Testament—except the book of Esther. The scrolls also contain a collection of previously unknown hymns, prayers, commentaries, mystical formulas and the earliest version of the Ten Commandments. Most were written in Hebrew, between 200 B.C. and the period prior to the failed Jewish revolt to gain political and religious independence from Rome that lasted from A.D. 66 to 70—predating by 8 to 11 centuries the oldest previously known Hebrew text of the Jewish Bible. In the last few years several significant scrolls were released by the scholars who kept them private for

- almost half a century after their discovery. As reported by Grant Jeffrey, these scrolls “shed new light on the New Testament and the life of Jesus ... One of the most extraordinary of the scrolls released in 1991 actually referred directly to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.” For more: <http://www.grantjeffrey.com/article/article1.htm>

Archeological History

- Much archeological evidence has been found to confirm the historical accuracy of the Bible, and there is nothing that directly refutes it.

Eyewitness Accounts from the First Century

- In the Gospels four separate individuals claim they knew Jesus personally (or knew those who knew Jesus personally) and were eyewitnesses to many key events. The Gospel authors are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The first three, because they are quite similar in content, are referred to as the Synoptic Gospels (Synoptic meaning “same.”) Summaries of what is known about these men follow:

1. Matthew. The son of Alphaeus; a publican, or tax-gatherer, at Capernaum. On one occasion, Jesus passed the custom-house where Matthew was seated, and said to him, “Follow me.” Matthew got up, followed him, and became his disciple (Matt. 9:9). Matthew was first known as Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). Only later is he called Matthew, which means “Gift of God.” Matthew was selected as one of the twelve Apostles (Luke 6:15). His name does not occur again in Gospel history, except in the lists of the apostles. The last notice of him is in Acts 1:13. The time and manner of his death are unknown. – Parsons Bible Dictionary

2. Mark. The evangelist; “John whose surname was Mark” (Acts 12:12, 25). Mark was his Roman name, which gradually came to supersede his Jewish name, John. He is called John in Acts 13:5, 13, and Mark in Acts 15:39, 2 Tim. 4:11, etc. He was the son of Mary, apparently a woman of some means and influence, and was probably born in Jerusalem, where his mother resided (Acts 12:12). We know nothing of his father. Mark was a cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10). It was in the house of Mark’s mother that Peter found “many gathered together praying” when he was released from prison; and it is probable that it was here that Mark was converted by Peter, who calls him his “son” (1 Peter 5:13). It is also probable that the “young man” spoken of in Mark 14:51, 52 was Mark himself. He is first mentioned in Acts 12:25.

Mark went with Paul and Barnabas on their first journey (about A.D. 47) as their “minister,” but from some cause turned back when they reached Perga in Pamphylia (Acts 12:25; 13:13). Three years afterwards a “sharp contention” arose between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-40), because Paul would not take Mark with him. He, however, was reconciled to the Apostle, for he was with him in his first imprisonment at Rome (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24). At a later period he was with Peter in Babylon (1 Peter 5:13); and he was with Timothy in Ephesus when Paul wrote him during his second imprisonment (2 Tim. 4:11). He then disappears from view. – Parsons Bible Dictionary

3. Luke. The evangelist; was a Gentile. The date and circumstances of his conversion are unknown. According to his own statement (Luke 1:2), he was not an “eyewitness and minister of the word from the beginning.” It is probable that he was a physician in Troas, and was there converted by Paul, to whom he attached himself. He accompanied Paul to Philippi, but did not share his imprisonment there. (Acts 17:1)

On Paul’s third visit to Philippi (Acts 20:5, 6) Luke is again present. In fact, Luke has probably spent seven or eight years in that city by the time Paul arrives. From this time, Luke was Paul’s constant companion during his journey to Jerusalem (Acts 20:6-21:18). He again disappears from view during Paul’s imprisonment at Jerusalem and Caesarea, and only reappears when Paul sets out for Rome (Acts 27:1). Luke accompanies him (Acts 28:2, 12-16), and remains with him until the close of his first imprisonment (Philemon 24; Col. 4:14). The last notice of the “beloved physician” is in 2 Tim. 4:11. – Parsons Bible Dictionary

4. John. The Apostle; brother of James the “Greater” (Matt. 4:21; 10:2; Mark 1:19; 3:17; 10:35). He was probably the youngest son of Zebedee (Matt. 4:21) and Salome (Matt. 27:56). He was born at Bethsaida. His father was apparently a man of some wealth (compare Mark 1:20; Luke 5:3; John 19:27). He was doubtless trained in all that constituted the ordinary education of Jewish youth. When he grew up he was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee. When John the Baptist began his ministry in the wilderness of Judea, John, with many others, gathered round him, and was deeply influenced by his teaching. There he heard the announcement, “Behold the Lamb of God,” and on the invitation of Jesus, became a disciple and ranked among his followers for a time (John 1:36, 37).

John and his brother then returned to their former avocation. Jesus again called them (Matt. 4:21; Luke 5:1-11), and they permanently attached themselves to the company of his disciples. He became one of the innermost circle (Mark 5:37; Matt. 17:1; 26:37; Mark 13:3). He is referred to as the disciple Jesus loved. In zeal and intensity of character he was a “Boanerges” (Mark 3:17). This spirit once and again broke out (Matt. 20:20-24; Mark 10:35-41; Luke 9:49, 54). At the betrayal, he and Peter followed Christ from a distance, while the others ran away and hid (John 18:15). At the trial, John followed Christ into the council chamber, and then to the praetorium (John 18:16, 19, 28), and to the place of crucifixion (John 19:26, 27).

Mary first tells John and Peter of the resurrection (John 20:2), and they are the first to go and see what she means. After the resurrection he and Peter again return to the Sea of Galilee, where the Lord reveals himself to them (21:1, 7). Peter and John are frequently together after this (Acts 3:1; 4:13). John apparently remained in Jerusalem as the leader of the church there (Acts 15:6; Gal. 2:9). His subsequent history is unrecorded. He was not there, however, at the time of Paul’s last visit (Acts 21:15-40). He appears to have retired to Ephesus, but at what time is unknown. The seven churches of Asia were under his special care (Rev. 1:11). He suffered persecution, and was banished to Patmos (Rev. 1:9), but at the end of his life he returned to Ephesus, where he died. This was probably about A.D. 98. John outlived all of the other Apostles. -- Parsons Bible Dictionary

A fifth and most amazing eyewitness to the life of Jesus

5. Paul. The Apostle Paul was educated as a Pharisee by Gamaliel, the leading teacher of his day. Paul was a leader among leaders, and he stepped out to defend his faith by chasing down Christians to be beaten, jailed and even murdered. Paul then had a life-changing encounter with Jesus, as is described in Acts 9, and in various letters written by him. What Paul writes is that the risen Jesus met him on the road to a town named Damascus. This changed his life so completely that Paul went from persecutor of Christians to a leading evangelist for Jesus. More of the New Testament is written by Paul than anyone else. There is nothing to account for Paul's 180-degree change other than an experience that shook him to the core. Paul was later murdered for his faith, most likely during the final days of the reign of Nero, circa 67 A.D.

To reject Paul's written accounts of his experience because "miracles don't happen" seems very much at odds with any sort of reasonable, logical examination of the man and his life. And Paul's words are vital because he is probably the best known spokesman for, and defender of, the Lordship of Jesus.

What accounts for the extraordinary behavior of these five Christ followers?

How does a rational human easily dismiss the possibility that the extraordinary courage and dedication of first century Christ followers was supported by space-time events they actually experienced? What else accounts for their behavior, especially their forgiveness of those who tortured and murdered them? If their words are not convincing enough, consider that none of the four Gospel authors, or Paul, benefited materially or in terms of personal prestige or power from speaking and writing about the events they claim changed their lives so dramatically. Despite being chased out of town after town, beaten, pummeled with stones, imprisoned, and forced to choose between recanting their faith or dying for it, they all stood firm, preferring to die for God than live for the lie that Jesus was not who he said he was.

2.

Claim: The authors of the four Gospels are unknown.

Response:

The historical writings produced by members of the early church strongly confirm that the Gospels were written by those whose names are on them. The authors' histories have already been summarized in earlier paragraphs.

3.

Claim: The Gospels are from one account that was copied, either from the Gospel of Mark or from "Q."

Response:

Q is a theoretical source. There is no historical evidence for Q, merely the suppositions of "scholars" who came along nearly 2000 years after the fact. If we can't believe people who lived when the Gospels were written – they wrote thousands of letters that support the Gospels -- how can we put our faith in authors who came 20 CENTURIES later and offer nothing more than theories to contradict the eyewitness accounts regarding what really happened?

Unlike the Gospel authors, modern scholars are not required to put their lives on the line. Their major risks are that they won't receive tenure or promotions or will suffer from weak book sales.

Thousands of first century men and women flocked to this new "religion," despite the fact that it led to serious persecution and, for many, horrible deaths. Even today, as we see in the news, thousands are still facing persecution and execution for their faith in Jesus, yet they refuse to deny that he is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. It is important to note that Christian martyrs of old (and modern Christian martyrs) do not die while trying to kill others; they die for refusing to recant their statements of faith. In this 21st century we are well aware of religious fanatics who are willing to kill in the hope that doing so will earn their way into Heaven. That sort of behavior is the antithesis of Christianity, whose faithful are told by Jesus that to be his followers they must love God and love their neighbors ("Neighbor" being a generic word meant to include all other humans).

4.

Claim: The Gospels aren't reliable because the original Gospel texts don't survive and the oldest Gospel copies are believed to date to A.D. 200 (roughly 167 years after the death of Jesus).

Response:

There are more than 5,000 existing copies of the Greek New Testament that date back to the first few centuries of the early church. No other ancient manuscript has survived with more than 10 genuine early copies. The wealth of surviving New Testament manuscripts, plus more than 100,000 letters from Christians that contain 99% of the New Testament, provide overwhelming proof that the New Testament text we have today reliably reflects what those who saw Jesus in the flesh were saying about him in the first century. Given the large quantity of early manuscripts and letters that confirm the Gospel accounts, it is amazing that nearly 2000 years later critics are claiming that the eyewitness accounts are not reliable.

It is especially important to compare what the Apostles did when Jesus was hung on the cross with what they did three days after. As they themselves relate, they initially ran and hid. They thought their Messiah – their King – had failed them like all previous men claiming to be the One, so they hid from sight, seeking to spare their own lives. It was only when they saw the risen Jesus with their own eyes that they began to understand what he had been teaching them. Roman soldiers of that day were efficient killing machines. It would take something miraculous to turn 11 ordinary men into fearless advocates for Jesus, knowing they may well face death, as he did. (Judas, the 12th Apostle, had already killed himself at this point.)

On the other hand, scholars who live (or lived) hundreds of years later and obviously did not personally witness events in the life of Jesus have been skeptical about the historicity of the Gospel accounts. Is their skepticism because the Gospel writers didn't pen their accounts immediately upon the resurrection of Jesus or do the skeptics come at the scripture with preconceived notions that prevent them from accepting the eyewitness accounts? We don't know exactly when the Gospel authors began to write about their experiences, but we do know they began to communicate openly about Jesus soon after they claimed to have seen him resurrected from the dead. They did not hide their newfound faith. If they had, the church would not have exploded into prominence as it did.

One or two eyewitnesses could be wrong. Three or four who tell the same story independently are not likely to be. A dozen or more who tell the same story are hard to ignore (the Apostles and others close to Jesus at the time of his death and resurrection). That's why it is important to liberal scholars that they justify their belief in Q, the single source for the

Gospels that no one has ever seen. By boiling the source for Christian beliefs down to one “myth teller” they can wipe away this foundation of the Christian faith: Jesus is the God who chose to live in the flesh, die on a cross, and come back to life to rule for all eternity. His life on Earth sounds like the stuff myths and fairy tales are made of, yet eyewitnesses who ran from Jesus on the cross, ran back to him after his resurrection. That can’t be explained by mass hysteria, desire for fame and fortune (they got quite the opposite), or anything other than having their worlds rocked by encountering firsthand the risen Jesus.

Again, I point out the inconsistent arguments of Gospel critics. Because the original texts have been lost, the Gospels can’t be trusted, despite the thousands of very early copies, quotes and fragments that still exist today. Yet Q is a viable option to critics of the Gospels, even though there is not a single letter or other historic reference that mentions Q, no original text, and no one has ever seen a copy or a scrap of a copy. Could the Apostles have shared information with one another when preparing their individual accounts? Of course. They spent a lot of time together when traveling with Jesus and immediately after his resurrection. Surely they talked at length about the amazing events they experienced together.

5.

Claim: The accuracy of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) is suspect because they differ in their descriptions of details. This claim is the opposite of another criticism: The Gospels can’t be trusted because the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, Luke) are too much alike in major details. (Synoptic means “same” or “similar to.”)

Response:

These two conflicting arguments defy logic. When four good eyewitnesses tell the same story, a story they have personally lived together, or which they’ve heard directly from those who lived it, one should expect a great many similarities. The four Gospels contain much that is alike, though told from different perspectives. While they differ in small details, they do not disagree on any major point, such as the claims of what Jesus taught or that he died on a cross and came to life again three days later. First- and second-century Jews memorized the teachings of their rabbis and could recount their sayings with great accuracy. They had to because writing was a slow, laborious process that only a few could do, and handwriting was the only option for producing originals and copies.

This practice of orally sharing events from actual space-time history easily accounts for the similarities -- and the differences in small details -- between the books. The Gospel authors were used to memorizing, as noted above, but they were still normal humans who witnessed an extraordinary life from slightly different perspectives. And they wrote from different parts of Asia at different times, without being linked by any of the tools or media we take for granted (e-mail, postal system, phones, newspapers, TV, radio, internet, printing press, photo copiers, etc.). What is remarkable is not that they agree on all of the major details; it’s that they disagree on only a handful of minor details.

6.

Claim: The Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life can’t possibly be true, because the biblical descriptions of supernatural events and prophecies foretelling future events are contrary to laws of science.

Response:

The Greek words for “miracle” used in the earliest Greek translations of the Gospels refer to “signs,” “wonders,” or “powers.” The intent of the Gospel writers was to show God using each supernatural event to reveal His power and His message to humanity. If God exists, this is a

perfectly rational interaction between Creator and creation. On the other hand, if God does not exist and the universe is a completely accidental and random place, how can anyone say with assurance that what we consider to be “laws” of science can’t be violated by the random and accidental nature of our world? Random implies lack of order, which is inconsistent with what we know of nature, and with the existence of unchanging scientific laws. To be irrational is to insist on the existence of set “natural laws” that restrict what is and isn’t possible in our world, while declaring that we live in a universe created out of nothing by random events.

David Hume, an influential 18th century Scottish philosopher, argued that it was impossible to prove miraculous events (events that overthrew natural laws) no matter how well they were backed by eyewitness evidence, because natural laws are unalterable and take precedence over eyewitness accounts. In other words, if the evidence for a miracle is overwhelming, simply say the eyewitnesses are mistaken, because human-defined “natural laws” overrule the real event.

Another well-known and widely quoted skeptic is David Frederick Strauss, who in 1835 wrote, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*. The book argues it is absurd to believe scriptural accounts of supernatural events in the life of Jesus. Strauss wrote, for instance, that Mark’s Gospel could not have been an accurate eyewitness account because it includes references to supernatural events. So much for objectivity ... or proof. In 1851, Bruno Bauer wrote that the Gospel of Mark was a fictional creation of the early church and Jesus likely never existed. In the twentieth century, Karl Barth wrote that the only important theological element in the Gospels was the death of Jesus on the cross. Beyond that, he said, we can know nothing. Barth made his claim despite eyewitnesses to the life of Christ who proved their trustworthiness by how they lived ... and died. Both Bauer and Barth were either ignorant of history or chose to ignore the thousands of existing ancient documents that support the accuracy of the Gospels and the life of Jesus, yet their views are still repeated as though they came from thoughtful and rational scholars.

Rudolph Bultmann concluded: “We can know almost nothing of the life and personality of Jesus except that he existed and died on a cross. Like the others, Bultmann rejected all the biblical and non-biblical evidence that supports the historical reality of Christ’s life and resurrection. He rejected the supernatural outright and refused to consider the possibility. Robert Funk, who funds the Jesus Seminar, ridicules Christianity and refers to much of the Gospels as myth that lies outside of science.

Marcus Borg, also of the Jesus Seminar, does not believe in God and denies Jesus was the Son of God. Even so, Borg identifies himself as a Christian. Apparently, Borg has chosen to redefine “Christian” to mean the opposite of what it has meant from its earliest first century use: a follower of Christ, the man who claimed to be God, and whose followers claim rose from the dead.

I make no claim to intellectual brilliance, but even I know that natural laws are merely observations made over time of how our world usually behaves. If a being can create a universe like the one we live in and devise “natural laws” in the first place, it is not logical to insist that this same Creator cannot modify his own creation or temporarily suspend its “natural” laws.

To disbelieve something simply because it does not fit one’s view of what is or isn’t possible is contrary to scholarly and scientific values that require keeping an open mind when in the pursuit of truth. Why is it more rational to assume that the world we know, and the humans who inhabit our world, evolved accidentally out of nothing than to consider that the beauty and order of our universe is the work of a magnificent, highly creative and orderly mind?

To reject the claims of men and women who were eyewitnesses to the miracles of Jesus before seriously considering those claims is the mark of closed minds. It is historical fact that

men and women claiming to be eyewitnesses to miraculous first century events willingly died cruel deaths rather than recant their testimonies about Jesus. Yet today many casually reject those witnesses simply because what the eyewitnesses saw does not fit their 21st century preconceptions.

7.

Claim: The Gospels are distorted by the viewpoints of the authors and the needs of the church.

Response:

This is a fallacious argument based on a sweeping generalization. Speaking specifically of the Gospels and the letters of the Apostle Paul, we find that many events are reported by more than one author. It's true that some events appear only once in New Testament Gospels or letters, but when only one account is given there is no reason to assume the event is not true simply because other authors didn't write about it.

That reaction indicates a personal bias on the part of the critic. Likewise, to assume a writer lied about an event to suit some unknown ulterior motive – without a shred of proof to back that assertion – indicates that the event is being read with bias, not with objectivity.

The Gospel authors wrote from different cities and at different times. We know their accounts were accepted by the early church. At the time the Gospels were written there were thousands of people still alive who had seen Jesus, heard about Jesus, or who knew those who had seen and heard Jesus. The authors knew what they faced when writing their testimonies. As ancient non-Christian historians documented, Christians were met with fierce opposition that often ended in violence or death.

Believing that the New Testament authors wrote and spoke the same well-coordinated lies – knowing they would be stoned, imprisoned, and even martyred – requires far more faith than believing that the Gospel authors were simply writing what they had seen, heard and experienced. James Sires writes in his book, *Why Good Arguments Often Fail*, that “chronological snobbery” is often involved in the decision to believe that miracles can't possibly happen. “Millions have trusted the Gospels for 2000 years,” he writes. “It is modern arrogance to assume superior knowledge based solely on being born 2000 years later.” I agree. Though we have more facts and figures at our disposal these days, we are no more intelligent or wise than those who lived in the first century. In fact, when we consider our increasingly violent culture, how we spend our time and money, and who we elect to positions of power, one might well make the case that humans are regressing.

8.

Claim: Christianity is for people who aren't very smart, who love myths and fairy tales, and who hate science.

Response:

It's a shame that some people feel the need to insult their fellow humans instead of presenting reasonable arguments for why they believe what they do. I believe in giving others the room to reach their own conclusions, without mocking their journey. Those who choose to reject the God of the Bible should at least take into consideration that no one can prove God does not exist. To deny him takes as much faith as it does to embrace his existence.

Most Christians I know believe God is the senior-most scientist in the world, the one

who wrote and set in place the "natural" laws human scientists are still trying to understand. We aren't anti-science; we embrace science because each new discovery tells us more about the wonder of God's work. And far from disproving the Bible, as science advances it catches up with what Moses and others wrote thousands of years ago. (The Bible doesn't claim to provide exhaustive scientific knowledge, but it does claim to be truthful.)

As to the intelligence of Christians, since the time of Jesus, many of the brightest people on the planet, scientists included, have accepted Jesus as their Lord. Look them up for yourself if you doubt that statement; examples aren't hard to find.

The practice of scientific discovery is supposed to be purely objective, but no human is purely objective, so no one who analyzes scientific data is ever going to be perfectly objective. What's surprising is that there are scientists who openly claim there is no God – though they have no scientific evidence to back their claim. Those scientists obviously aren't trying to be objective. The foundational belief for secular evolutionists, for instance, is that there is no God, or at least that God was not involved in the creation of the universe.

Those who believe in a God who not only exists but who is active in space-time history act on faith, but so do those who say evolution by chance is a fact. Science can answer many of life's questions and duplicate many of life's processes, but science can never conclusively prove the contingent universe theory. Think about it. How can anyone recreate a random, accidental event? If you intend to create it, the event isn't random or accidental. So, even if someone eventually figures out how to create life from a smaller version of the big bang, they'll only be demonstrating that it takes creative genius to do what they are attempting to prove happened by accident. Creative genius equals Creation theory.

Faith-based science ought to be subject to the same arguments that are applied to Christianity. One of the first arguments used against Christianity is that Christians claim an exclusive hold on certain truths, including: God's existence, His character, how to be in relationship with Him, how He created this world, and what He wants from His creation.

This claim to exclusive knowledge is arrogant say the critics. How can one religion claim to be more right than any other? How dare these fanatics believe they have an exclusive claim to truth? Shall we now remind them of the scientific claim to an exclusive truth about the origin of life, one that can't be proven and which can't even be shown to make the best sense out of what we know about the universe? Even so, those claiming faith in an atheistic brand of evolutionary theory have driven the teaching of Creationism out of our schools. How? By forcefully claiming that acknowledging the possibility of a Creator-God blasphemes their god of science.

Personally, I look forward to science advancing our knowledge of how the world works. Because I believe God is the smartest scientist in any room, my view is that scientific progress will lead us closer to the originator of science, not away from Him.

My faith is based, in part, on the Bible. In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, the author states that God created the heavens, earth, and life on earth. It says God created man in his image (the Hebrew word translated "man" means "humanity – men and women"). The Bible also says that God did this in six days. Before you laugh yourself to death, you should be aware that "yom," the Hebrew word translated "days," is not defined by 24 hours. It can mean an indefinite period of time, sunrise to sunset, a solar day, and more.

The Bible explains that God, being eternal, is not limited by either time or space. Time is only important when there is a beginning and end to the life of a person or thing. The Bible also leaves open to question whether God set in play an evolutionary process that is still going on millions of years later or created life pretty much as we know it now, in the blink of an eye. Who has scientific proof that God didn't, at the very least, start the process? Even a big bang

needed someone or something to light the fuse.

But long-term evolution versus six-day creation isn't a major issue as far as I'm concerned. What's important is recognizing that God is the Designer and we are the designees. He put us on earth to love him and to love each other. It doesn't take a belief in God to realize that this would be a much better world if all of us were more loving to one another, even when we disagree on politics, religion, or science -- no, especially when we disagree.

9.

Claim: How dare Christians claim the one and only path to God. Who makes Christians the keepers of truth?

Response:

If Christianity is guilty, all religions and all belief systems are equally guilty. That's because all require certain beliefs that are inconsistent with the beliefs of the others. Even atheism and non-theistic evolutionary theories require the adherence to certain "truths," the most important of which is that God is not responsible for creating us and our universe.

What the major world religions have in common, it seems to me, are values such as the universal human need to love and be loved, the importance of beauty, our innate desire for justice, and the longing to understand why we exist. If we were all created by a personal God and share the characteristics of his personality, it makes sense that many major religions started with the same basic values and still share them.

Those who believe the universe was created out of impersonal matter have different problems, however. For starters, they have no answer for how the first matter came to exist or how personality developed from inanimate chemicals and particles. An atheistic physicist will say a "singularity," in essence, a miracle that can't be explained, led to the first life on earth. These same scientists will defy logic by claiming that the miracles of the Bible could not have happened because they violate the rules of Physics. Go figure.

A pantheist says that God is in everything and everything is God, which gives rocks, dogs and your favorite Aunt the same standing in eternity. I find that view leaves a great many unanswered questions about life. For instance, do rocks have personality, an appreciation for beauty and can they feel pain? Somehow I doubt it.

Deists believe that a higher being of some sort, maybe even a sovereign God, created the universe, set it in motion, then moved on, taking no further notice of what he or she started on earth. They also believe that this impersonal being left us with no way to know him, her, or it. Again, I find the deistic view leaves many unanswered questions. For instance, if God is uninterested in what happens on earth, who was this Jesus, this man who created such a stir during his brief stay on the planet? Jesus claimed to be God come in the flesh.

What Jesus said about himself offended the Jewish religious leaders. He worried the Roman rulers, too. They feared that Jesus might incite the Jews to rebel against them. To keep peace and appease the Jewish religious leaders, the Romans teamed with the Jews to torture and mock Jesus, and then finish him off on a cross. These events are not the stuff of myth or fable; they are verified by ancient documents from the Roman, Jewish and Christian communities.

For all the controversy that surrounds Jesus, most agree on one thing: Jesus was an extraordinary man. From that point on, we differ. That's because Jesus did and said things that ordinary people simply don't say and do. He did not provide witty proverbs or ethical gems to help people get rich and gain power over others. No, Jesus said things like, "*I and the Father [by which he meant God] are one,*" and, "*If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.*" And,

maybe most shocking of all, *“No one comes to the Father except through me.”* See what I mean? Ordinary people don’t say things like this! God and I are one? No one comes to God except by me?

Those are bold claims of eternal consequence. That being the case, Jesus is either God stooping down to the human level -- as an adult kneels to look eye to eye with a child -- or Jesus is a raving lunatic. There is no way Jesus should be viewed as just a good teacher with a message of love. He’s a nut or he’s who he claimed to be. Don’t decide which until you’ve read what his friends and other eyewitnesses wrote about him (The Gospel of John is a good starting place) and, please, ask Jesus to reveal himself to you. If he’s dead, you’ve lost nothing and no one will ever know you asked. If he responds, you’ll know you’ve just had a personal encounter with the living God.

10.

Claim: Why put my trust in Jesus, when other “messiahs” have made the same claim to a God-commissioned mission on earth?

Response:

Before and after Jesus there were men who falsely claimed to be the Jewish Messiah or prophets sent by God to start a new religion. No one later claimed to see any of the others arise from the dead and it was Jesus who left the most startling impact. Once the fakers were dead, they stayed dead and, for the most part, their followers faded away.

When Jesus was arrested by the Romans, his followers, fearing for their lives, ran away and hid. What brought these followers of Jesus back into the open, they insisted, was seeing their Messiah alive after he was known to be dead. They said they not only saw him, but touched him and sat down to eat with him before he returned to Heaven. In other words, they weren’t claiming to have seen a ghost or a spirit, but a living man.

Many saw a Roman soldier use his sword to make sure Jesus was dead before he was taken from the cross and placed in a tomb. No one got off a Roman cross alive. Not ever. So why did the followers of Jesus boldly begin to declare that their Messiah had come back to life unless they had actually seen him alive? One or two people might allow themselves to be tortured for a delusion. One or two might die for claims born of mental illness. How can a skeptic explain the fact that thousands of Christians were (and still are) willing to face horrible deaths for Jesus? They can’t all be crazy; they must have looked at Jesus and become convinced that he was who he said he was.

Some say his followers were fakers looking for personal gain. The foolishness of that claim is obvious. The first Christians were persecuted, beaten, and all but one of the original Apostles died at the hands of political leaders or religious zealots. They had nothing to gain by dying as martyrs; they were promised no virgins in Heaven, no special rewards. They knew that once they accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, they were already back in God’s good graces, with the assurance of an eternity that was better than anything they could hope for or imagine. Their salvation was a gift; there was nothing they could do to earn a better standing with God. Genesis Chapters 1-3 explains the foundation for the “back in God’s graces” statement. You can read a study of those chapters elsewhere on this website.

If you want to find out for yourself what those of us who follow him see in Jesus, invite him into your life, right here, right now. Just ask. To follow up, read one of the four Gospels. I recommend John for an excellent introduction to his life.